

HWY-07-MH-007  
Huntsville, AL

## **ATTACHMENT #6**

**RECORD OF WITNESS INTERVIEW  
THADDEUS SOKOLOWSKI**

**(3 Pages)**



**NTSB**

**National Transportation Safety Board**

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## **RECORD OF INTERVIEW THADDEUS SOKOLOWSKI**

DATE: November 24, 2006

LOCATION: Huntsville Public Safety Center

PRESENT: Thaddeus Sokolowski, witness; NTSB Investigator Paula Sind-Prunier; Sgt. Ed Cain, Huntsville PD; Bonnie Sokolowski, witness's mother

The witness is a student at Lee High School, and attends classes at the Huntsville Center for Technology. His DOB is \_\_\_\_\_, and he resides at \_\_\_\_\_, Huntsville, AL. His home telephone number is \_\_\_\_\_. He completed a written statement for the Huntsville Police Department.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the accident, the witness was a passenger in a 4-door gold vehicle (unknown make/model) driven by Beau Tucker, another Lee High student.

According to the witness, the buses normally leave Lee High around 10:10 a.m. daily for the trip to the Tech Center. There are two buses, and on that morning, one bus left earlier than the other. The vehicle in which he was riding was driving behind the orange Toyota Celica shortly before the accident, when the Toyota was behind the school bus.

The witness states that the Toyota appeared to attempt to pass the school bus, and then began fishtailing. He stated that it looked like the Toyota was going to hit the right wall, and he believes that the driver of the Toyota tried to correct, and then hit the bus, and then hit the left bridge wall. He saw the bus go over.

He states that he rode the bus for about the first three weeks of the school year. He does not drive, but has traveled as a passenger with classmates since that time. He explained that there is a form they can submit that authorizes them to drive or ride as a passenger to the Tech Center, rather than ride the school bus—although he stated that he had not submitted the required form. He says that those who drive usually take the same general route as the school bus, although many of the students who drive usually stop at a nearby gas station for snacks en route—they often exit at Bob Wallace, the school bus exits at Drake. Despite stopping to purchase snacks, the students who drive often arrive at the Tech Center before the bus. He stated that the buses don't drive too fast—if anything, they drive too slow, with lines of cars forming behind the bus.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the written statement for additional information.

He reiterated that he saw the back end of the Toyota swerving, and believed that the driver was probably trying to regain control, and seemed to have possibly overcorrected<sup>2</sup>

He states that after the crash, Beau got over into the left lane, passed Tony's car, and he ran back and checked on Tony. He said that they had swerved around the bus driver, who was lying in the roadway. He said that when he checked on Tony, Tony was crying. He asked whether he was alright, and Tony replied that he was okay. He went to the wall and looked at the bus, and paramedics came shortly after.

He states that Lee High has a stricter policy than the Tech Center. Lee High's policy does not permit carpooling—it only permits a student to drive himself/herself—however, he also said the policy is not enforced.

He emphasized that the bus had no trouble going over the barrier—it hit and went right over without hesitation. He said that the bridge rail barrier had no effect on the bus. His mother commented that she'd heard others discussing the bridge rail barrier, and they'd adopted the phrase "Thirty-Two Won't Do"—referring to the current height standard for the barrier.

In talking with friends who were on the bus, he noticed that those who were not seriously hurt had told him they held on and ducked behind the seat in front of them. He felt that training students who ride buses to assume a crashworthy position in the event of a possible crash might help to prevent injuries.

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<sup>2</sup> His mother interjected the term, after he implied the concept. He stated that he does not drive.